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ABSTRACT

To develop a useful attitude toward the issue of getting published, graduate students need to explore both personally and professionally what it means to be a member of a discourse community, what it means to have what they know constructed by that community, and what the boundaries are between their personal and academic selves and voices. Graduate students would do well to enter into the academic conversation by reading the major journals in their field, deciding which ones they want to write for, and then joining the conversation. Ideally, such writing could be done as part of completing a paper for a graduate course. Graduate student groups ("research colloquiums") can be useful places to share writing and get feedback. Graduate students must learn to develop and trust their own voices to enter effectively into this arena. (SR)

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1991 CCCC, PANEL ON "GRADUATE STUDENTS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT"
Writing for Publication

I want to talk about graduate school as "Oh-my-god-I-gottas." No, that's not a far eastern chant--It's one graduate students--especially in our field--know well. It's our mantra: OH-MY-GOD-I-GOTTA:

get into a good program

take the right classes

get good grades

teach well

do administrative work

maintain my sanity and dignity

keep up with the field

get involved

pass my comprehensive exams

present at conferences--

and the one I'll be most concerned with for the next few minutes: OH MY GOD I GOTTA GET PUBLISHED.

I want to suggest, however, that if we take that attitude about getting published, chances are we'll find ourselves <u>not</u> getting published.

That is, if we take the attitude that:

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'* Oh my God I gotta get published--because THEY say I do and not because I really have anything to say or want to say.

*... because I gotta be what other people expect me to be.

*... because everyone else is and that's the only way I can get a good job--which is a lot like saying "Oh my God I gotta go to church not because I like going but because if I don't go everyone in town will know I'm not there."

If we take any of these attitudes about publishing, about getting ourselves published, we're more than likely to feel stripped of our voices, our dignity, our sanity even if we should we get published. In short, then, such an attitude works against our selves.

So.... how to save (and even find) the self, save and even find our voices, save and even find a good job--AND get published? I have here only some speculations, some purely subjective observations. What I'd like to hear from you when I'm done is some of your own speculations and observations--in addition to, or even against, my own.

If we look in our major journals we read, over and over again, that our discipline is currently caught up in the idea of "discourse communities," of "knowledge as socially constructed," and of the boundaries around and between academic discourse and personal voice. If we want to get published we probably would do well to swim with these currents--both practically and theoretically.

Theoretically by exploring for ourselves--both personally and professionally--what it means to be a member of a discourse community (namely, the discourse community of Composition and Rhetoric studies), what it means to have what we know constructed by that community, and to explore for ourselves--again, both personally and professionally--what the boundaries are between our personal and academic selves and voices.

And practically to go with the current, by reading those journals that form those currents. In other words--we "gotta" enter into the conversation. And the best way to do that, as we all know from having hung on the edges of conversational circles at social gatherings, is to hang back for a little bit, do some listening, see what the content and tone of the conversation is, then add our own two cents worth. You know how much we all groan at those who barge into conversations--often not really talking about what everyone else has been talking about, just rudely interrupting, and talking to talk, to let everyone know just what they know, and then exit the conversation? We hate it when that happens.

So hang back and listen. Read the journals for awhile. See where the conversation comes from, where it's leading to. Listen to the content and tone. Then put in two cents--or more, if it's there to give.

But don't put in two cents with the voice of "Oh-I'm-only-a-graduate-student-and-I-gotta-say-something-now-because-I-gotta-say-something-but-gee-I-don't-really-have-anything-to-say." If

you do that and send if off to a journal they'll recognize it for the rude, insensitive interruption it probably is and it'll come back so fast the stamps on it will spin. It'll come back with a little letter and reviewer remarks something to the effect of "sounds like a graduate student paper." Ouch. And I know--it's happened to me more than once.

Put in your pesos with the voice of "Hi, I've been listening and watching closely for awhile--I know what kind of articles your journal publishes, who writes them, what they're about, and what tone they say it in. I think I've got something equally important to say." Their little ears will perk up.

Yep, they might send it back, and yep, a reviewer or two just might leave a slash mark across your ego, but hey, you can be sure they will have listened if they go to the trouble to argue with you. "Sounds like a graduate student paper" isn't much of an argument. What do you say back to that? End of conversation.

So read the journals for awhile, decide which one you can and more importantly, which one you want to write for. Then--pardon the borrowed advertisement--JUST DO IT. Ideally, the best way to do it is "not on your own sweet time," but as part of completing a paper for a graduate student course. This means, of course, that those who teach graduate classes need to encourage writing for the journals rather than writing graduate student papers. This means, of course, that such classes need to

encourage reading the journals, talking about them. (I hope some of those who teach such graduate courses are here right now).

And when you've finished writing such a paper, let others besides just your course's professor read it. Please. The best way is if such draft-sharing is built into our graduate classes. But whether it is or isn't, we probably could and should help each other out. What about forming little bands of graduate student scholars--those who want to get together, share what they've read and thought about from recent journals or books, as well as those who want to share their own writing? According to a survey of graduate student in rhetoric and comp programs I did two years ago, there are some of those little bands out there at various programs across the country right now. And they spoke highly of the camaraderie, collegiality, and value of their "research colloquiums," as they were most often called. Such colloquiums are the place to see how well you can carry on a conversation--to see if you have anything to say, and morever, to see if you can say it well, say it, you know, rhetorically.

My last point it that you "gotta" have a voice to enter into the conversation. Depend on and listen to others--that's cheap advice your parents starting giving you a long time ago. But most of all--depend on and listen to yourself. Trust your own voice. If your voice is strong and sound, you will be heard. You'll get published. Be sure of it.

If you read the journals you'll see how many of those who are published in there are the same ones, over and over, in many

different journals--some 5-6 articles a year they crank out. They have things to say. What's more, they obviously like saying them, obviously like writing. They're tenured and famed by now. They don't need to keep publishing all those articles. They just like to. They've got voices they're sure of and voices we like to hear.

Now I want to stop and hear your voices. . . . Do you have any ideas or stories to tell about getting published?